# THE MISSES BRENTHAM.

BY P. A. BLYTH,

*Author of "Paul Porter and his Brothers," "Broken Reeds," etc.*

"And thus the compact between them was mutually sealed." p. 181

## CHAPTER VI.

### AFTER LONG YEARS.

TEN years passed by, and at a picturesque retreat in North Wales one summer afternoon, two ladies sat quietly watching the incoming tide. There was sufficient likeness between them to denote them mother and daughter. The elder woman had a gentle, sensible face, and the younger one was like her in the expression of her dark eyes—eyes that yet had in them sometimes a look of half-expressed sadness; but it was seldom the sorrowful expression was

allowed to prevail. Generally they were the same kindly, gentle eyes they had been ten years before, ere a sudden bitterness of pain had troubled their quiet depths. The two had been sitting silently enjoying the calm of the summer afternoon; then looking down at a photograph she held in her hand, Polly Brentham said quietly, still with downcast glance, "Mother, the gentleman cousin Mary has married is like, a little like, Charles Stanley."

Mrs. Brentham glanced round quickly. Once there had been a time when with white, pained face her daughter had said, "Don't speak of him to me, mother. I will try and be a good daughter to you and do my duty, and will be patient, as though it had all never happened; but don't speak of him, never again mention his name to me, mother." And Mrs. Brentham had complied. So between the two there was silence upon a theme near to the hearts of both, and, instead of words, that deep sympathy of soul which unites in closer bonds than speech. But the trial, met thus with a brave, patient faith, had developed only Christian grace, and a character ennobled and refined. When Polly thus of her own accord mentioned the forbidden name, her mother glanced round with a half-surprised, half-pleased expression; that her daughter thus voluntarily alluded to Charles Stanley seemed a proof that the old wound had at length healed. But Polly made no further remark, only sat looking intently at the portrait lately sent her of her cousin's husband. The next instant a gentleman came walking slowly up to the spot where they were sitting. He looked pale, haggard and ill; he stooped slightly as from recent sickness, and his steps were slow and faltering. He glanced with weary, yearning eyes at the bench upon which there seemed no room for him to rest. Polly Brentham just then looking up noted his languid appearance, and, with the quick instinct of kindness, made room for him beside her. The stranger gladly availed himself of the proffered seat, then, turning, he looked into the face of the lady who had thus befriended him; their eyes suddenly met, and not the absence, pain, nor suffering of the past ten years could hinder the mutual, instantaneous recognition.

"Mr. Stanley!" Polly uttered, instinctively.

Charles Stanley rose; he laid one hand on the back of the wooden bench, as though for support, and visibly trembled in the presence of the woman he had once so slighted and wronged. Broken down, tired out as he was, evidently he would have endeavoured to walk on further; he must not take even this trifling kindness from *her* hands. But Polly, noting his look and appearance, rose too, and pointing to the wooden bench, with a look of sudden compassion in her eyes, said gently, "You are ill and tired; I pray you stop and rest." Then, laying her mother's hand on her arm, she walked quietly away.

Charles Stanley sat down as desired, and, with one hand shading his eyes, watched with hungry, eager glance their retreating forms. This was the woman whom he had often told himself he could never meet or face again, and now the meeting had come about quite naturally and unsought, and she had spoken gently to him, and looked at him with kind, compassionate eyes. Would she turn once more and look at him like that again? He leaned forward eagerly, his eyes watching intently the two figures moving away across the glittering sands. But no, she neither turned nor looked. Still he watched with eager, yearning gaze—watched till they left the sands, and crossing towards the houses, became hidden from his view. Then, with a low moan of pain, he sank back on the resting-place her kind thought had provided him. Of course he must flee the place; weak, feeble, ill as he was, he must not risk another meeting. But sick men are not always masters over their own purposes. In his then weak condition that chance encounter strangely agitated him; and when in addition to mental distress, a sudden return of illness came upon him, he had no alternative but to abide still in the same place, till at least a little more strength could be regained. He knew he was ill, very ill; so ill that one day his doctor asked the ominous question, "Had he any friends he would like sent for to him?" Friends, yes, he had friends, brothers and sisters; he had seen and visited them since his return to England; they knew he was now at his present resort seeking change of air and scene, and they would come to him at a moment's notice—but the sick man turned his head away with an uneasy moan. During those last ten years of his life he seemed to have isolated himself from the near members of his family.

Ten years! during which time fortune, that had seemed formerly so capricious, had been beneficent at last. On his leaving England that second time he had worked with the maddened energy of a nature suddenly stung and aroused into action. Mrs. Brentham's plain speaking did one thing for him; it fired him with the fierce resolve to conquer what had always seemed to him his untoward fate. A galley-slave could not have worked with more arduous toil; a feverish zeal took possession of him; he would be rich yet in his own right; never should mere poverty again have the power to place him in such a humiliating position as that he had just experienced. And labour as usual won its reward; he came home a rich man at last, but the struggle had been a sharp one, and of late his health and strength had given way, and it was the bitter drop in his cup of prosperity that now the long-coveted gold was fairly in his grasp he had no healthy power to enjoy its possession. And the doctor stood looking gravely at him and asking him if he had friends. He felt all that question might imply.

"Am I so ill as that?" he said, gloomily.

The doctor smiled. "Not ill enough to make the presence of your friends here a necessity, certainly not; but you are lonely, and your spirits out of tune. I thought your friends round you might brighten and cheer you up."

Charles Stanley paused a moment. "I'll not send for them just yet," he said, slowly.

But when the doctor had quitted him, and he was again by himself, feeble, ill and lonely, literally he turned his face to the wall and wept. The heart sickness and heavy mind old Mrs. Brentham had spoken of had come upon him, and as far as human solace went, he felt himself desolate and alone.

But a little ray of light speedily irradiated the gloom. The next morning came an unexpected letter from his old friend and cousin, Dr. Bowtell. He had heard of Charles Stanley's return and ill-health, he was about to take a short holiday from his professional duties, he would run down into North Wales and look up his sick relative. The letter was like Dr. Bowtell himself, hearty and genial. Charles Stanley could not but be cheered and comforted by its perusal, and the expectation of seeing the old familiar face sent a new throb of life rushing through his veins. Yet the sight of Dr. Bowtell would strangely recall the scenes connected with that time when last they had been together. Still, his kind letter and hearty goodwill cast a brightening ray over the sick man's life. Dr. Bowtell did not give him time for any feverish expectation; close upon the receipt of his letter, he put in his personal appearance. Ten years had not much altered Dr. Bowtell; he had the same frank, genial face and smile. His professional eye took in quickly the main points in his cousin's case.

"You want rest," he said, "and brightening up. I can't find there is anything very serious amiss with you; you are only low, and out of strength and tune."

Then with ready goodwill he set himself to effect a little of the brightening process. He drew Charles Stanley's couch close to the open window.

"Get the air and sunlight all you can," he said, pleasantly; "even the sight, too, of the passers-by will divert and cheer you up."

Charles Stanley could not resist his kindly efforts, and allowed his couch to be thus placed where he could view a little that outer world, which he was dimly conscious he had, ever since that afternoon's memorable meeting, endeavoured with morbid sensitiveness to shut out from his thoughts and vision.

Dr. Bowtell proved an agreeable companion; after an hour of his cheery society, Charles Stanley could have fancied himself already stronger.

"I am glad you came," he said; "I think the sight of you quite restores me."

"That's right, I am glad to hear you say so." But Dr. Bowtell was answering half mechanically; his attention was at that moment absorbed by some passers-by. Leaning his head out over the window-sill—"Why—why, I declare, it is Miss Brentham and her mother."

The sound of his voice reached the ears of the people thus designated; looking up at the open window, there was a rapid exchange of friendly nods, and then the two ladies went on their way. Dr. Bowtell, still leaning out of the window, stood for a moment looking after them; had he hastily withdrawn his head, he could not have failed to observe the sudden pallor on his cousin's face his words had produced. When he did turn his head in that direction, Charles Stanley had somewhat recovered his equilibrium, and, forcibly rallying, he said, quietly,

"Yes, I saw Miss Brentham and the lady with her on the promenade a few days ago."

"Ah, you knew Miss Brentham, I think?"

"Yes."

There was a certain restraint in Charles Stanley's voice and manner which did not quite escape Dr. Bowtell's notice, but in reality he knew nothing of the facts of the case. The Brenthams had kept their own counsel, and nothing of the true reason of his cousin's abrupt departure from his house had reached Dr. Bowtell's ears.

But the subject thus introduced had subtle fascination for Charles Stanley.

"I think you said that was Miss Brentham's mother?"

"Yes, if you knew Miss Brentham you would know her, they are much alike."

"Yes."

Charles Stanley grew fidgety in manner; then, suddenly nerving himself for the question, he asked,

"Is old Mrs. Brentham still living?"

"Old Mrs. Brentham—no, she has been dead about three or four years. She left her house and home to the granddaughter who used to live with her, but the young lady was very much attached to her grandmother, and could not for a time take up her residence there; she has been travelling abroad, and has quite recently married, some gentleman she met abroad, I believe. That was her cousin, you know, Miss Polly Brentham, who went by just now. A very excellent lady is Miss Polly Brentham."

"Yes."

The affirmative was faintly spoken. Charles Stanley felt he of all men had no right to descant on the excellencies of the lady in question.

A moment after, Dr. Bowtell started a different theme for discussion, but his companion had suddenly become listless and preoccupied, and the brightening effect his coming had produced seemed to have vanished quite away. And during the days following, in addition to his illness, Dr. Bowtell found his cousin strangely perverse and inconsistent, and though inconsistency is the avowed prerogative of invalids, Charles Stanley carried his prerogative to such a degree as to put both the Doctor's discrimination and patience sorely to the test. Professedly staying out for change of air, he obstinately refused to quit the hotel, save for long carriage drives through the most seldom frequented roads, or he would consent to go out only at unseasonable hours when the visitors of the place were least likely to be encountered. Very inconsistent all this seemed to Dr. Bowtell.

"My dear Charles," he said, "a man in your state should live in the open air, and this seems to me exactly the spot for you,—mountain and sea air combined, what could you have finer? But if you are tired of being here, I will move with you anywhere you like, or take a tour to the places round—Llanberis and Beddgelert; you could go by easy stages, and the pure mountain air would put new life into you."

But Charles Stanley turned with a little shuddering sigh from the idea of that tourist-frequented route, and the many accidental meetings and encounters such a proceeding might involve. No, he would take it quietly where he was till he felt a little stronger, then his determination was to start at once for London. And Dr. Bowtell was obliged, though reluctantly, to yield the point. Yet with a fickle perversity that even to himself seemed unaccountable, Charles Stanley was conscious of a half-expressed longing for the very event he dreaded. So it happened that through long, balmy days, when his cousin was making short tours in the adjacent picturesque neighbourhood, Charles Stanley would lie on his couch by the window, watching, though he scarcely owned it to himself, for a face that never came. Many people went to and fro past the hotel windows, but Polly Brentham never once passed before his gaze. Then another thought arose in his mind; she had done what he himself had been unable to do—fled away, escaped at once from a presence that could not fail to be odious and obnoxious to her. But on this point he was speedily undeceived. Dr. Bowtell coming in soon afterwards, related an interview he had just had with Mrs. Brentham and her daughter.

"I told them you were ill," he added, "and asked them in to speak to you."

"What did they say?" Charles Stanley asked the question with averted face.

"Oh, Mrs. Brentham pleaded some urgent engagement; but there is time for that, they are living here for the present, have taken a house for the season. When on a visit last year, the air proved so beneficial to Mrs. Brentham that she decided to take a house and spend several months here. They think of staying through the autumn and quite till early winter."

Then Charles Stanley had not driven her away as he fancied. He hardly knew whether to be most consoled or agitated by the fact.

The next morning was Sunday, and Charles Stanley appeared so decidedly ill that no thoughts of leaving the hotel for church could be entertained. Still, he persisted urgently upon his cousin attending, and Dr. Bowtell eventually decided to do so.

The time of the morning service was over, and Charles Stanley on his couch by the window lay awaiting his

cousin's return. Soon he saw him coming round the corner of the street, but not coming alone. A lady was walking by his side. A second rapid glance showed him it was Polly Brentham. As they came nearer he could see her more plainly. How good and sweet and kind she looked! Was this the Miss Brentham who ten years ago had seemed almost awkwardly reserved, immatured in manner and bearing? Ah, then he had seen and judged of her in a false position, now he saw her in her true province, a woman gentle, true and good, illuminating the home circle of which she was the gracious centre. They paused opposite the hotel. Dr. Bowtell looked up at the open window, evidently guiding his companion's glance in that direction. Charles Stanley instinctively drew back, so as not to meet her gaze, yet plainly he caught the light and expression of her eyes, eyes pitiful and kind as he had seen them that afternoon on the esplanade, as they had come to him since in his dreams. But her glance was only momentary, the next instant she had shaken hands with the Doctor, and was walking on alone.

That evening Charles Stanley appeared so much worse that Dr. Bowtell looking at him, said thoughtfully,

"Charles, if you don't improve, I shall ask one of your brothers to come and be with you when I go; I cannot leave you here thus ill alone."

With the readiness with which sick people are prone to exaggerate any apprehensions expressed on their behalf, Charles Stanley fancied Dr. Bowtell was actuated by the same feeling that had prompted the local doctor to suggest sending for his relatives. Looking up with wistful earnestness into Dr. Bowtell's face,

"I believe," he said, "you think in your own mind that I shall not eventually recover. I wish you would tell me the truth."

Dr. Bowtell looked back steadily into his cousin's face.

"The truth, then, is, Charles, I see no reason why you should not get perfectly well again—in fact, you are a puzzle to me; it seems to me you might recover, and recover speedily, if only you would."

Charles Stanley did not reply. Was his will at fault in the matter? He was not absolutely wretched enough to give up all desire of life by any means, but he was quite morbidly despondent enough to fancy he had not such urgent reasons for seeking to prolong his life as some men had.

During that night he lay ill in bed, wakeful in mind, and through the night's calm, silent hours, his past life arose before him with vivid distinctness. In that retrospect, how worthless seemed all he had craved and striven for; how beautiful—only beautiful and desirable, goodness and truth. With this new sense of humility and contrition awoke definite future resolve, and then through all a thought, a purpose, seemed steadily forcing itself upon him. He was very ill, Dr. Bowtell would not speak positively of his recovery. Should he never really rally, there was one thing he would like to do. He would like to see Polly Brentham again, face to face. Reparation he could never make for the wrong he once did her, but it would seem something like justice, something like poor atonement, to speak to her once again upon the matter, and ask forgiveness from her lips. If she withheld her pardon he had no right to complain, but the one effort towards compensation, the only one that seemed to him that lay in his power, would have been performed.

The next morning Charles Stanley's haggard appearance prompted Dr. Bowtell to send for one of his cousin's relatives at once.

"I should like to see some one properly installed here as companion for you," he said, kindly. "From letters I have just received, I fear I may have to hasten home earlier than I thought, but I must see you comfortably settled before I go."

Charles Stanley did not reply for a moment, his mind seemed pre-occupied. Then looking straight at Dr. Bowtell:

"Send word to-morrow, that will do. But there is something else I want you to do for me. There is some one much nearer at hand I would like to see and speak to. Will you undertake a commission for me?"

"Yes, certainly; anything in my power."

"Will you, then, ask Miss Brentham to come and see me?"

"Ask Miss Brentham!"

Dr. Bowtell looked at his cousin in undisguised astonishment; at the same moment some hazy ideas, some memories that ten years had well-nigh obliterated passed dimly through his mind, of some joke, some connecting of names at least between Miss Brentham and his cousin, but it had been Miss Brentham the heiress—his memory was distinct on that point.

"It is Miss Polly Brentham," he said, "I think you know that, who is staying here now."

"Yes, and it is Miss Polly Brentham I want to see."

There was such impressive earnestness in Charles Stanley's voice, that Dr. Bowtell looked at him narrowly. That some kind of mental suffering or disquietude at times oppressed him was not a new idea—he had half suspected something of the kind; but that Polly Brentham could have any share in the matter was the surprising part to him. Charles Stanley saw his cousin's perplexity, and looking at him with affectionate earnestness he said,

"I know this seems strange to you, but at present, at least, I feel I cannot explain. I would not have thus far troubled you, but your past kindness to me, which has been more like that of a brother, makes me bold to ask this favour at your hands."

"My dear Charles, I will do this for you willingly, and I by no means ask a confidence you may wish to withhold; I only felt a little surprise at the request."

"Yes, I know, as I said, it sounds strange to you, but Miss Brentham will understand. Will you tell her just how ill, very ill I am, and that I crave an interview with her? I have something I would say to her, and I shall esteem it a merciful act on her part if she will come as I desire."

Again Dr. Bowtell hastily promised, though he could have wished the subject had not had quite such an agitating effect upon the invalid thus under his care. If the matter had to be gone through with, it struck him it had better be done at once; suspense is always more trying than even painful action.

"When would you like to see her?" he asked.

"I should like to see her soon, but I don't want to hurry you about it."

Then seeing Dr. Bowtell rose as though to carry out his errand, "There is just one thing more—she may refuse to come."

Again Dr. Bowtell looked keenly at his cousin; the affair was simply inexplicable to him.

"Not much fear of that, I should think," he said, good-naturedly.

"If she does, she will only be doing what I have the right to expect," Charles Stanley murmured almost to himself, but Dr. Bowtell caught the words, and feeling no little mystified, set off on his expedition.

Perhaps Charles Stanley did not know the whole truth of the old saying, "If you want a thing done, do it yourself;" for though Dr. Bowtell performed the part entrusted to him to the best of his ability, he either bungled in his work, or failed to understand the nature of the requested interview; so though in about half an hour's time he returned with Miss Brentham, she evidently had not considered the meeting to be one exclusively for herself, for, to Charles Stanley's dismay, her mother accompanied her.

It was impossible in the presence of this last personage to enact with proper effect the little scene Charles Stanley had planned out for himself. Something too in Miss Brentham's presence dispelled the idea of scenic effect of any kind. Her manner towards him was simple, yet dignified with a quiet composure. It was the gracious bearing of a courteous, gentle-hearted woman towards a weak, suffering man.

The interview was a short one; all the telling words he had intended to say seemed in her soothing presence to melt away from his memory, and he had not the energy to forcibly recall the part he had intended to perform. He let her go away as she had come, simply unostentatiously pitiful and kind; and the supplicatory prayer he had purposed to make to her remained still unuttered. But from that day Charles Stanley continued steadily to improve, and when Dr. Bowtell eventually left, he no longer saw urgent necessity for sending one of his own family to attend and assist him.

Charles Stanley, too, no longer obstinately persisted in remaining indoors; he consented to go out at seasonable hours and in frequented places. In consequence of these outings, many other meetings between him and Miss Brentham naturally occurred—meetings marked sometimes only by exchange of bows, at most consisting only of a few words, such as any ordinary acquaintances might utter, meetings in which Miss Brentham always maintained the same courteous and decorous demeanour. Mrs. Brentham, too, was almost invariably in her daughter's company, yet these chance meetings, commonplace as they might look to an observer, became spots of brightness in Charles Stanley's isolated life.

So it happened that summer glided into autumn, and though Charles Stanley had almost regained his usual health and strength, he made no effort to carry out that first hasty resolve of fleeing from the place—rather, he seemed blissfully content with his present quarters. And as the time went on, the meetings between him and Mary Brentham—such he heard her again designated, that being in fact her real home name—lost something of the restraint and novelty they had at first assumed. Yet still on Charles Stanley's soul was an ever-growing purpose, a resolve becoming more and more fixed and settled, to speak out one day that something which he had first purposed in hours of weakness and pain, and which now, with the return of health and strength, seemed more and more incumbent upon him. The opportunity at last arrived. Late one autumn afternoon, he had been walking a considerable distance on the sea-shore—a point of headland jutting out across the sand seemed a natural limit to his walk—and he was about to retrace his steps, when at that moment Miss Brentham came round the projecting point, evidently going homewards also. They saw and recognised each other. It was too obvious their ways were the same; had they desired to escape one another's society, they could hardly have done so. For some little way they walked together discussing ordinary topics, but more and more powerfully the conviction was forcing itself upon Charles Stanley's mind, that the long-looked-for time for speaking out the thoughts he had so often craved to utter had at length fully arrived. Pausing in his walk, and facing round on his companion,

"Miss Brentham," he said, "there is something I have long desired to say to you. I would fain, for your sake, make no reference to a painful past, but only by doing so can I speak what I have to say. Miss Brentham, once I did you a heartless wrong; afterwards, when far away, often I told myself I must never see your face again, and when we met here had you spurned me from your sight, it would only have been justly my due; but instead, that first day we met and ever since, you have only treated me with noble generosity. But, oh, I can never tell you, when I have looked into your face or touched your hand, the ardent craving I have felt to entreat, to ask what I am about to ask of you now—the one word—forgiveness."

Miss Brentham did not immediately reply, her eyes were downcast, and Charles Stanley could not read their meaning. With impressive earnestness he added,

"If I am asking more than you can grant, I will not blame you, or complain. I will only go away and never hope to look upon your face again."

Then she looked up at him, answering him simply, honestly,

"Mr. Stanley, forgiveness with me is no new act. I forgave that past long ago."

Charles Stanley moved a step nearer to her.

"Miss Brentham, you are the best, the noblest woman I have ever known. Were you otherwise, I could not mention to you what I have yet to say. Could you not have granted me pardon, it would have seemed insult to you. As it is, it is your righteous due. Miss Brentham, once I proved myself bitterly false. Now, though late, I am intensely, earnestly true. Miss Brentham, my whole heart's love is yours—yours entirely and alone. But, oh, believe me, I do not even now say this through hope of winning your love in return; to that I dare not aspire. Neither is it reparation; that, too, is beyond my power. Still, this confession is your due, and may you yet remember me as one who loves you earnestly, with his whole heart."

Miss Brentham was looking away from him over the glittering sea, standing with averted face, as once long ago she had stood one afternoon in the wind and rain, outside Mrs. Brentham's house.

After a moment's silence, holding his hand towards her,

"Miss Brentham," Charles Stanley said, "if I have not deeply offended you by saying this, will you once more let me take your hand in mine?"

Turning her face towards him, she gave him her hand, and, as she looked at him, unconsciously her eyes betrayed a language her lips could never have framed.

Impulsively Charles Stanley grasped the proffered hand.

"Miss Brentham, I said I would not ask your love, I was unworthy of it. Yet if I go away, your lips must speak the word. And oh, Mary, if I might have the bliss to stop—but no, I do not deserve it—but look at me, speak to me, just one word."

She answered him by a silent act, more expressive than speech. Pausing a moment, she gently laid her other hand in his.

Charles Stanley stooped and reverently kissed it; and thus the compact between them was mutually sealed.

Half an hour later, two happy people still lingered on those shining sands and by that glittering sea. When at length they turned their faces homewards, at that moment, the setting sun breaking out from behind a ridge of clouds, shone with sudden lustre over the scene. The waters of the little bay gleamed and sparkled under his beams, and the

hills and mountains flashed beneath his rays with tender radiance. Everything seemed in blissful unison with Charles Stanley's happy thoughts. Pointing to the Penmaenmawr range,

"Look, love," he said, "the mountains are flushing with a rosy glow; but a little while back and they were sober grey."

Smiling into his face, she answered—

"Perhaps we saw them with other eyes than now."

For reply Charles Stanley pressed closer to him the hand lying on his arm.

When Mrs. Brentham heard for the second time of her daughter's engagement, as formerly she gave but very tardy consent. All her other children were either married or settled to some life or occupation of their own. But Mary, her eldest, through long years her one loving friend and constant companion, it was a hard trial parting thus with her at last. But Mrs. Brentham's reluctance was not to Charles Stanley the worst obstacle. He had yet further than this to hear. He had flattered himself with the happy thought of one day being able at least to richly endow with this world's wealth the woman he had once so wronged. Poor compensation as it might have been, the thought was in some measure consoling to him, but now he had yet to learn that old Mrs. Brentham's prophecy, that Polly would one day be anything but a poor woman, had been no idle boast. Her house and home she had left truly to the granddaughter who had lived with her, but the bulk of her fortune went to Polly's family. The mother and the children were all well remembered, but to Polly herself came so substantial a share, that so far from being a poor woman, she had in reality become a very rich woman indeed. Charles Stanley had once renounced her for his wife because she was poor, now could he have brought himself again to renounce her, it would have been because she was rich. At once he began proposing stringent marriage settlements and bonds, which should effectually make his wife's portion securely her own, but Miss Brentham herself put final ending to the subject, when she said,

"All mine will be yours, and all yours will be mine; what then can it matter?"

Charles Stanley could not help recalling old Mrs. Brentham's words—not a long life would ever efface from his mind some of the things she one night said to him, and he remembered plainly how she had spoken of husband and wife sharing their wealth together right royally and equally because of the true love between them. Marriage bonds and settlements seemed useless things in a case like this.

A few months later, Charles Stanley paid another visit to Dr. Bowtell. This time he went not alone, his newly-married wife accompanied him.

The first evening of his arrival, Dr. Bowtell offering the usual congratulations, said with a hearty smile,

"Yes, Charles, we wish you both the customary health, wealth, and happiness, though to people richly endowed as you, the wealth may seem a superfluous item."

Charles Stanley placed his wife's hand fondly on his arm.

"Yes," he said, "my wife and I are thankful for an abundant share of this world's good, and of much that goes far to make life happy and pleasant, but we rank as our highest wealth, our true love to one another. This is one of the riches gold can never buy."

THE END.

## "GOOD TIDINGS."

"Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."—St. Luke ii. 10, 11.

In many a lowly village church and noble city fane will this grand old anthem be sung on Christmas Day, and very sweet and joyous will be the singing; but the heartiest and sweetest voices will be able to render but faintly the exuberance of reverent joy with which the angel of the Lord announced Christ's birth to the startled, frightened shepherds watching their flocks on the starlit eastern plain.

We can scarce wonder that they were afraid at the advent of the angel and the "multitude of the heavenly host." The reassuring "Fear not" was a necessary preface to the good news they came to announce. But quickly does all fear vanish, and when the last strain of the heavenly singers has died away in the depths of the sparkling dome of night above them, their first words are, "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us"; and straightway they leave their flocks and go and worship.

Shall we leave them to go alone to Bethlehem, or shall we go with them to worship and adore Him whom God has sent for our salvation? Surely we must sing with them their joyous song, and go in spirit to Bethlehem to see this wondrous thing which is come to pass, for the good news is for us, as much as ever it was for these poor shepherds.

For us there are no angel visitants, nor any material babe to worship; but we can make the angels' song our own, and the eye of faith can discern, afar off, and dim and distant as in a vision, the babe in His manger cradle, with His mother and Joseph and the shepherds bending over Him in holy, reverent awe, worshipping and adoring Him—God incarnate. Oh, let us join them. While we stand and gaze from afar, we feel that it must be good to be there. We would like to join that little band—and there is no need for us to stand aloof, for He is our Saviour, our very own, if we will but have Him, born for us and our salvation. Let us venture, then, and kneel among the worshippers. We shall find peace and refreshing there beside the Christ-child's lowly bed; and when we turn back to the world it will be with a strange, sweet gladness that we knew not before.

And in the world we must share this gladness. The angels came to proclaim to men the glorious news of the Saviour's birth, and we shall be taking up the angels' work if we go amongst our fellows and diligently spread the good news we have heard. Think of it—the honour and the privilege of it—to be permitted to go on with the work that God sent His angels to begin.

It is not enough that *we* know the "good tidings of great joy." So long as there is one living soul who has not

heard Messiah's name, our work will not be done. We must each one severally in his different way, and so far as in him lies, go out into the world and preach the gospel to every creature. The good tidings are not for us alone, they are for everybody.

May God hasten the day when the tidings that the angels came to bring so long ago shall have been repeated from end to end of the world, till not one soul but shall have heard and rejoiced in them. And may we all do our utmost to this grand end. Our mightiest efforts will seem poor indeed when we receive the thanks of God Himself for what we have done, in the day when He makes up His jewels. D.

## MOTHERS AT HOME.

BY E. M. WATERWORTH.

### CHAPTER VI.

OUR HUSBANDS—HOW TO MANAGE THEM.

Don't imagine for one moment that I approve of so-called woman's rights, and am going to tell you how to put your husband in the background, how to assert your superiority to him, and how to make yourself generally disagreeable. No, I quite agree with the wiseacre who remarked that woman's rights meant man's wrongs, and I venture to affirm that there is not a husband who shall read this chapter who will say I teach insubordination. Nevertheless, I must start with this bold assertion, that every good wife should earn how to manage her husband.

Your husband comes home tired and hungry, we will suppose; what do you do? If you begin at once to scold him for being late, or to tell him that the cat has killed three of the new chickens, or that Jones has been for the rent and says he won't wait another day, then I maintain that you do not know how to manage your husband.

Let the poor fellow rest after his work. A hungry man is an angry man; therefore get him something to eat as soon as possible. When he has eaten it, and is sitting quietly by the fireside, or playing with the baby, then you can unfold your budget of bad news or bothers. Many a family jar might be avoided if wives would only remember this golden rule; never bother your husband the moment he comes into the house.

Don't have any secrets from him. There is nothing that undermines love between husband and wife so quickly. The moment you let in suspicion, all confidence must fly out of the window, and love will soon follow.

If you love your husband, as I trust you do, do not be ashamed to tell him so, do not be ashamed to let that love influence you in every way. You promised to love him, you chose him to be all in all to you; why then should you shrink from letting him and everyone else know that you love him still?

> "Always the same, Darby my own,
> Always the same to your old wife Joan."

But time changes us all, you will say perhaps. The young man you knew and loved so well years ago has disappointed your hopes. He is a cold, thoughtless husband; not downright unkind perhaps, but you feel as I have heard more than one poor woman say, "I'd rather he'd hit me than treat me like that."

Well, what is to be done now? Briefly this: bear it patiently, silently. As with your children's so with your husband's faults; no possible good can come of discussing them, and serious harm may follow. I suppose of all the married couples in the world there are but few who are really as happy as they expected to be; many more have found too late that they have made a bad bargain, and to most of us comes the problem which we long to solve, "How to be happy, though married."

The days of miracles are gone, but I can promise you that if you will try to carry out the suggestions I have made, you will go a long way towards finding the answer to that riddle.

Be considerate to your husband; be loving to him; do not have any secrets from him, and do not talk about his faults. Above all, pray for him. If you can pray *with* him, so much the better, but at any rate pray *for* him; and then try to find out whether the change has come through any fault of yours.

Think of the days when you and he were courting. Did you not love to make yourself look nice that you might please him? Why, then, do you as his wife neglect those little things? Florence Nightingale says that it is a mistake to dress in too sombre a fashion in a sick room; the sight of a bright ribbon will often give freshness to the mind wearied by the sight of the same four walls day after day.

So in our married life; it is a mistake for *wives* to neglect the little arts of pleasing which they practised as sweethearts. Don't laugh at the term, dear friends; it is a good old-fashioned word, full of tender meaning, far more so than the modern substitutes. It has been said that conceit "is to the human character what salt is to the ocean; it keeps it sweet, and renders it endurable."

The woman who has lost the pleasant conceit which makes her delight in her husband's approving glance or word, is pretty sure to become ere long a discontented, untidy grumbler, for to quote the same author, "The man who thinks his wife, his baby, his horse, his dogs and himself severally unequalled, is almost sure to be a good-humoured person, though liable to be tedious at times."

How fond some of us are of nagging! I have known some women who, really loved their husbands, nag, nag, nag about trifles till one longed for the days of the scold's bridle to come back again. Brevity is the soul of correction as well as of wit. If you have a grievance say what you have got to say and have done with it. Don't let the shadow of this morning's little quarrel stretch through the day, shutting out the sunlight of love and happiness. Especially would I urge this in the management of our children. Correct them if necessary by all means, but for pity's sake don't nag at them. Don't be cold with them to-day because they grieved

you yesterday. You may think it is necessary so to show your displeasure, but you will find to your cost that you have thus taught both husband and children to be indifferent, if not to be sulky.

Don't be afraid of making the first overtures of peace; it is false pride which tempts us so often to stand upon our dignity. "It's all very well, but why should I be put upon? If he wants to make it up I don't mind, but why should I be first?"

That sounds very fine, dear friends, and the people who know nothing about true love and friendship are always ready to talk in that fashion; but two wrongs never yet made one right. If you love your husband or your friend truly, better far than you love yourself, you will not listen to such arguments.

"To err is human;" you and I do it every day, every hour of our lives; "to forgive divine;" and God gives us the chance of imitating Him if we will forgive those who have wronged us. Which will you choose?

Mutual love, mutual trust, mutual forgiveness; these are needed between husband and wife, and if they exist, then marriage is not a failure, but a success, for troubles and worries shared are but half their weight, and pleasures and blessings are doubled.

Here are some exquisite verses by Gerald Massey, one of our living poets who began life in a silk mill, and, therefore, has known what it is to work hard, as well as to love deeply. Happy is the husband or wife who can read these words and say amen to them:—

"Oh, lay thy hand in mine, dear!
We're growing old, we're growing old;
But Time hath brought no sign, dear,
That hearts grow cold, that hearts grow cold.
'Tis long, long since our new love
Made life divine, made life divine;
But age enricheth true love,
Like noble wine, like noble wine.

And lay thy cheek to mine, dear,
And take thy rest, and take thy rest;
Mine arms around thee twine, dear,
And make thy nest, and make thy nest.
A many cares are pressing
On this dear head, on this dear head;
But Sorrow's hands in blessing
Are surely laid, are surely laid.

Oh, lean thy life on mine, dear!
'Twill shelter thee, 'twill shelter thee,
Thou art a winsome vine, dear,
On my young tree, on my young tree.
And so till boughs are leafless,
And songbirds flown, and songbirds flown,
We'll twine, then lay us, griefless
Together down, together down."

## CHRISTMAS CAROLS.

[The two following rare old Christmas Carols are probably the oldest in the English language. They were found by Mr. J. Wright, of the Percy Society, in a MS. of the fifteenth century. The first is given word for word in its old style; the latter is modernised in language that it may be better understood by those not given to mediæval studies.]

I.

To blys God bryng us al and sum,
*Christe, redemptor omnium.*
In Bedlem, that fayer cyte,
Was born a Chyld that was so fre,
Lord and Prince of hey degre,
*Jam lucis orto sidere.*
Jhesu, for the lowe of The,
Chylder wer slayn grett plente
In Bedlem that fayer cyte,
*A solis ortus cardine.*
As the sune schynth in the glas,
So Jhesu of hys moder borne was;
Him to serve God gyffe us grace,
*O lux beata Trinitas.*
Now is he oure Lord Jhesus;
Thus hath he veryly vysyt us;
Now to mak mery among us,
*Exultet cœlum laudibus.*

II.

Sweet Jesus now has come to earth
At this good time of Christmas,
Wherefore let us praise his birth
And welcome our Messias.

Welcome be this blessed Feast
Of Jesus Christ in Trinitie,
Who comes to give us rest
And joy and peace and charity.

In time of peace this Child was born,
As prophets showed, in days of yore,
To save mankind that was forlorn,
The King of Peace for evermore.

Therefore pray we to that Lord,
And Son of mother mayden fre,
To make us wise in work and word
To praise and bless the Trinitie.

Gathering the Christmas Evergreens.

## "WEEDS."

*By the Author of "We Wives," etc.*

THE other day I was picking big yellow daisies in a field some distance from home. Suddenly from behind the hedge of blackthorn and brambles I heard the following conversation:—

"What is she doing?" in a tone of wonderment.

Then, "Why—she is gathering *weeds*."

"An' whatever can a lady like she want wi' *weeds?*"

*Weeds?* I looked at the mass of bright, golden blossoms in some consternation. Were they in truth only *weeds?* Had I driven such a long way in the little donkey trap to gather—*weeds?* Had I pictured them, in vision, grouped artistically in my best Sevres jar, and was I so taken in as

to meditate desecrating that relic of bygone splendour with —*weeds?*

Half pitifully—half laughingly I gazed at my bunch of beautiful amber daisies, until a little voice at my elbow drew my attention.

"Never mind, ma'amy, if they are only weeds they are very pretty."

Oh! innocent heart of a child! solving the question so easily. *Only* weeds, but——

I thanked God inaudibly for the education of eye and taste that could find beauty and pleasure even in—*weeds!* To me those daisies were cups of God's own gold enclosing a cushion of fairy down. To me they were stars of tender, living colour radiating from a centre of amber. To me they were bits from Nature's smile. While to the rustic mind they were only—"*weeds!*"

Going home I called in at a friend's house to leave some of my treasures. The mother was upstairs in her daily treadmill, the nursery. An acquaintance staying there greeted me warmly.

"So glad to see you! This is a weary house for the unattached. Mrs. ——— is with her children morning, noon and night. What she can see in them I don't know."

Quickly the quaint conceit flashed across my mind, and I spoke it aloud, unconsciously—

"Only weeds."

No! I couldn't explain when called upon. Only, as I gathered my daisies closer, I thought of how that *mother* looked upon her bairnies. To *her* they were bits of God's sunshine. To *her* they were the very pivot and centre of existence. To *her* they were treasures unpriced. To onlookers they were "weeds."

All through that day the words haunted me. Taking up a monthly magazine on my return home, I read a brilliant, scintillating article. It spoke of the Bible much as "a mass of unauthenticated, improbable legends."

"Weeds—only weeds." I could hear the voice behind the hedge of bramble. To us the lovely story of Christ's life, of Christ's work, of Christ's death, is inexpressibly pathetic and solemn. To us Calvary is the Mount where even enemies were forced to confess the truth, "This is the Son of God." To us the Bible contains everything Holy and Comforting and Sublime.

To the critic with the pen, it is "only weeds." Thank God, again I say, that most of us find it a book for youth and age. A book for sorrow and joy. A book for birth and death. A book for time and eternity. "Only weeds," oh critic, say you? but *we* thank God for the enlightened eyes that see *His* gems in *your* "weeds."

"No! we never cared for the Jews! They remind one of grease and curls and old clo'."

Thus, that same evening, ran conversation on the steps of a conference hall. The subject of the lecture given had been pithily put in one word, "Israelites." It might just as well have been "weeds."

No beauty could many who entered that place find in the ancient people—the people Israel. Yet as I listened I thought of my daisies. No form or comeliness to the unenlightened mind; but perfect in comeliness to those who studied the Hebrew prophecies. Beautiful in the past history and one day to be more beautiful still. Clothed in "weeds" of widowhood at present, yet in the future to be adorned with the golden glories of a bride. For a little moment forsaken—yet with great mercies to be gathered. No longer shall the Hebrews be as "weeds" to me encumbering the ground, for I would fain inherit the benediction, "Blessed be he that blesseth thee."

A letter of condolence in a heavy affliction was due to a friend on my return home. Heavily moved the pen over a page of thick antique. What consolation could I offer to the one bereft of husband, friend and son?

"Weeds" indeed seemed the leaden, too familiar words, and, with something like relief, the hieroglyphic signature was scratched in one corner and the letter despatched. "It will do no good! Perhaps the crudeness of expression will repulse instead of comforting," I moaned, as I awaited the reply. It came.

My "weeds" had been blossoms of help and comfort to the stricken one. After all, words tipped with love and winged with prayer *will* be fruitful. Like the tiny seed germ, blown afar by the wind, finding its appointed spot, so will every blessing sent to help another come home, like the chicken, to roost.

Can we not, as we go on through life, learn to cultivate our "weeds" until they become our treasures? A little action here. A tiny thought there. A line of life near. A star of hope afar. None will be lost. There *is* coming a harvest. The reapers will be the angels. May we find a bundle of golden sheaves awaiting us instead of miscalled

"WEEDS."

## A FRIEND.

A BLESSED thing it is for any man or woman to have a friend, one human soul whom we can trust utterly, who knows the best and the worst of us, and who loves us in spite of all our faults; who will speak the honest truth to us while the world flatters us to our face, and laughs at us behind our back; who will give us counsel and reproof in the day of prosperity and self-conceit; but who, again, will comfort and encourage us in the day of difficulty and sorrow, when the world leaves us alone to fight our own battle as we can. If we have had the good fortune to win such a friend, let us do anything rather than lose him. He must give and forgive, live and let live. If our friend has faults, we must bear with them. We must hope all things, believe all things, endure all things, rather than lose that most precious of all earthly possessions, a trusty friend. And a friend, once won, need never be lost, if we will only be trusty and true to ourselves. Friends may part not merely in body, but in spirit for awhile. In the bustle of business, and the accidents of life they may lose sight of each other for years; and more, they may begin to differ in their success in life, in their opinions, in their habits, and there may for a time be coldness and estrangement between them, but not for ever, if each will be but trusty and true. For then, according to the beautiful figure of the poet, they will be like two ships which set sail at evening from the same port, and ere nightfall lose sight of each other, and go each on its own course and at its own pace for many days, through many storms and seas; and yet meet again, and find themselves lying side by side in the same haven when their long voyage is past.—*C. Kingsley.*

## DRESS AND DRESSMAKING.

Before proceeding to the question of dress proper it is necessary to point out the desirability of wearing at least during winter some kind of woollen underclothing next the skin, either in the shape of vest and drawers, or "combinations," which are very good for many reasons. In order to allow for substantial woollen underclothing the dress bodice must fit easily and have sufficient room in the bust and waist measures, for nothing looks worse than to see a dress strained till its stitches almost give way, till the button-holes are torn out, or the hooks make themselves visible. A very pretty way of making a bodice, and one that admits of the use of two kinds of material, is with a full top from the neckband to about the middle of the bust, and shoulders finished off with a piping cord, while the remainder is quite plain. This cannot be done with very thick material, but it is a pretty style for cashmere, or velveteen looks nice made up with a full top of soft silk of the same colour. Velveteens are very warm, and look extremely well at small cost, especially the dark browns and blues. It is a capital plan to have enough of the material in either of these colours to make a pretty little mantle; sling mantles are still fashionable, and need no trimming. These are wearable on fine mild days, and can always be finished out with a beige or cashmere of the same or lighter tint in spring and autumn, and finally serve to cut up for new sleeves or fronts to the original dress. There is nothing like cutting and contriving to make things last and do duty as long as is consistent with neatness and cleanliness, for according to the old saying, "Economy is a great income." Velveteen has this further advantage, that it looks well by gas or any artificial light long after it has ceased to be presentable by the light of day.

A very great comfort to busy people is that in these days of banded bodices and plain skirts they can usually be sewn together, so that there is little need for adjustment. The weight of the skirt pulls the bodice into its proper place, and prevents it from riding up, so that there is no need for putting pins in unaccustomed places, or making elaborate arrangements of buttons and button-holes, which only drag out the stuff they are sewn to.

Here is a neat and yet stylish way of trimming a new bodice or renovating an old one. There is a basque with shallow tabs at the back, but from the side seam it is brought gradually round to a very moderate point in front. A widish-shaped band of braid passementerie covers the collar, there is a straight piece of the same down the middle of the front which hides the hooks (button-holes being superseded by this arrangement), pieces of proper shape go round the arm-holes, and between these and the centre trimming the bodice is fulled a little from the shoulder to the point of the waist. A waist-band of the same passementerie comes from the back side-seam, and is stitched down to the point on one side, while on the other it has to be hooked up after the bodice is on and fastened.

Hats are very flat indeed, with the exception of a few which are pretty much like a boy's cap with a peak in front. These are chiefly made in navy blue, as that suits so many dresses.

Our sketches this month are of little children's clothes. The make is really very simple, and the small garments seem to gather strength from the sewing machine, provided that the turnings in are sufficient. Little girls' pelisses cannot be made otherwise than plain with circular capes, plain round bodices, and sleeves long enough to cover the small wrists. In fact, it is a good plan to put a little tuck in the sleeves which can be let down as the arms lengthen. The way to cut a circular cape is to spread out the material on the table lengthway with the selvedge top and bottom. The centre of the back of the cape comes nearly or quite to the lower selvedge, and the straight fronts of the cape are formed by the upper selvedge with a circular place cut out for the neck. If the material is not very thick, domette must be tacked on the wrong side. Then the lining must be cut out about half an inch smaller all round than the stuff, and run on, beginning by running down the fronts. Then begin again in the middle of the lower part, easing the stuff on to the lining very slightly. Turn inside out, lay flat, tack all the way round, and finish the neck with piping cord, alittle turn-down collar, or a straight narrow neck-band.


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